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ABSTRACT

A study to determine whether educational discrepancies exist between urban and rural sections of Liberia used descriptive analysis to examine curriculum, instructional personnel and facilities, finances, and administrative organization. Sources of data included official documents from the Liberian Ministry of Education; the education section of the 1980-81 report of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs; United Nations publications on education in developing countries; the senior researcher's experiences as a rural school student in Liberia and later as a youth coordinator and an Assistant Director of Teacher Education in the Ministry of Education; and publications about Liberian social, cultural, economic, political, and educational life. Major findings included that 40% or fewer of rural schools followed the prescribed curricula, relevance of which may be questioned because of a high dropout rate; and the level of teacher qualification was low, a greater problem in rural schools, half of whose teachers had a high school education or less. Other major findings were that all school facilities were below standards required for effective school programs; a general lack of funding for education existed, especially for elementary schools; and ministry reports verified an imbalance in the central educational administration, to the detriment of rural schools, primarily because of problems of transportation and communication. (Author/MH)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RURAL-URBAN BALANCE FOR EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A CASE STUDY OF LIBERIA

by

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April, 1983

For economic, social, and human reasons, education is an indispensable agency for the national development of any nation. In developing countries, where the people are engaged in a struggle to survive and to improve the living standards for the next generation, education assumes an even greater challenge than in the established nations. Although nearly half of the residents of developing nations can be described as living in rural areas, there is an obvious disparity between the educational opportunities for rural persons of developing nations as opposed to the opportunities for urban residents. In order to deal with the economic, social, and human problems of developing nations, it seems essential that there be an educational balance between rural and urban residents and that the total educational thrust be directed toward solving any inequities.

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Digest of the article, "An Analysis of the Rural-Urban Balance for Education in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Liberia," by Albert B. Coleman and Elmer J. Clark

The purpose of the study was to determine if educational discrepancies exist between the urban and rural sections of Liberia. Facets of education examined through a descriptive analysis by the investigators included curriculum, instructional facilities, finances, instructional personnel, and administrative organization. Major findings were as follows: (1) The prescribed curricula are not being followed by an appreciable number of the schools, with the problem being greater in the rural schools than in the urban schools. (2) The level of teacher qualification is low; this problem is of greater significance in the rural schools, where half of the teachers have a high school education or less as their highest educational accomplishment. (3) The school facilities of all schools are far below standards required for an effective school program. (4) There is a general lack of funding for education, especially in the elementary schools. (5) Ministry reports verify that an imbalance exists to the discredit of rural schools in respect to the plan of educational administration; the primary cause of this imbalance appears to be because of problems of communication and transportation. The writers stressed the need for further research in Liberia and other developing nations, with a view to stimulating more effective schools which will respond to the needs of the populations of those countries.

Purpose and Method of the Study

In order to analyze the rural-urban balance for education in developing countries, specific attention was focused on Liberia, the homeland of the senior investigator. The purpose of the study was to determine if educational discrepancies exist between urban and rural sections of Liberia, taking into consideration the following facets of education: curriculum, instructional personnel, physical facilities, finances or allocations, and administrative organization.

It was the hope of the investigators that the present study would assist educational officials and the citizens of Liberia in assessing future priorities in respect to the total educational program. If the suspected imbalance between urban and rural education would be proven in fact, corrections for such inequities could be made. While the researchers could not provide first-hand evidence concerning the balance of education in all developing countries, it was hoped that the present investigation might form the basis for future research, nation by nation, by the same or other investigators.

Descriptive analysis was utilized as the basic methodology of the study. Concerning themselves with the five facets of education mentioned above, the researchers attempted to discover the interrelationships among the dimensions of the five problem areas and to determine, if possible, the cause-effect direction of such relationships. A comparison of the rural schools and urban schools then was pursued, the method being to consider likenesses and differences in the conditions of each set of schools in respect to the five educational facets.

The main sources of data for the study included the following: (1) official papers, documents, and reports from the Liberian Ministry of Education; (2) the education section of the 1980-81 report of the Liberian Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs; (3) pertinent United Nations

documentary publications and reports on education in developing countries; (4) the senior researcher's own experiences, as a rural school student in Liberia, then as a youth coordinator and as an Assistant Director of Teacher Education in the Liberian Ministry of Education; and (5) theses, monographs, books, and articles pertaining to Liberian social, cultural, economic, political, and educational life.

Related Studies

Few studies have dealt specifically with the problem of the imbalance between urban and rural education, particularly in Liberia. Those studies which have dealt with the general characteristics of the educational system have not considered the factor of urban-rural balance in relationship to the overall development program and nation-building. A general report was prepared by UNESCO, which considered urban and rural balance in general terms. That report indicated that employment opportunities are more limited, illiteracy rates are higher, and the supply of teachers is lower in rural areas than in urban areas.[1]

Brown, in reviewing the early educational and national development in Liberia, concluded that from the very founding of the nation there was a school imbalance, with urban students being in substantially larger percentages than rural students. She also noted that educational efforts were generally confined to the colonists, with the natives being neglected.[2]

Brann, while reviewing the general status of African education in 1974, concluded that historically Liberia's educational programs had suffered from discrimination between the settlers' oligarchy and the natives' autochthonous population, a problem which he said was only being overcome

by the 1963-67 five-year plan and the 1967-70 education sector plan.[3]

Carlon discovered the existence of poor educational planning and administration on the part of the Liberian educational system. He noted that planning was done almost exclusively by the Ministry of Education, that there was virtually no direct imput into the plans for education, and that there was a lack of administrative and supervisory expertise for the effective management of Liberian schools.[4]

An assessment by the World Bank concerning developing countries indicated that the relatively high economic growth rates recorded during the 1960's brought little or no benefits to the poorest sections of the societies of those countries. The World Bank report brought the realization that the equitable distribution of income is not an automatic corollary of growth. The report emphasized further that mass education is more effective when economic development is positive.[5]

Background Information about Liberia and Its Educational System

Liberia, situated on the west coast of Africa, comprises an area of approximately 43,000 square miles and has a population of about 1.5 million. Children under 15 years of age constitute 37.3 percent of the total population, and those over 65 constitute only 4 percent. The annual increase of the population is estimated at 1.8 percent. The low rate of growth is due largely to the escalating rate of infant mortality.[6]

The population of Liberia consists of three main groups. One group is made up of the descendants of slaves who were forcibly carried away from their African homeland to the United States and later returned to Liberia through the efforts of the American Colonization Society. The second group is composed largely of descendants of tribes who migrated from

the Sudan and adjacent regions of West Africa as a result of the Trans-Sahara Trade. The third group is composed of naturalized citizens who came from other countries and decided to claim Liberian citizenship.[7]

Liberia has a democratic form of government. However, in April, 1980 the nation was placed under martial law, with the People's Redemption Council having full legislative and executive powers. The cause of the military coup was said to be the unequal distribution of wealth and development projects. The military leader has said his main concern is to concentrate on the rural areas which he believed have been "left untouched for too long."[8]

Prior to the introduction of the western form of education, the best known and most widespread educational method in Liberia was the regularly-organized system of the secret societies, Poro and Sande, which were called "bush schools." Western-type schools, introduced in the nineteenth century, were basically concerned with Christianizing and civilizing the people.[9]

The present educational structure of Liberia is based on the 6-3-3 system. The system is centralized under the Ministry of Education, whose Minister is appointed by the Head of State.

Findings Concerning Five Educational Factors

Curricula

The curricula for the elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools of Liberia are prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Currently there is an attempt to orient the curricula toward serving the economic and technological development of the nation. Such development was predicted by the present Minister of Education, Dr. George

E. S. Boley, when he said, " . . . the Ministry has become cognizant of the fact that in any educational system, the curriculum serves as the instrument for insuring relevance and functionality."[10]

While the components of the Liberian school curricula are prescribed by the Ministry, the evidence indicates that many of the schools do not have terminal grades at the three educational levels and that the drop-out rate is such that only one-third of the students finish elementary school, one-fourth complete the junior high school, and only fourteen of every one hundred is graduated from high school.[11]

Some discrepancy was found between the urban and rural schools of Liberia in respect to those schools following the prescribed list of courses. As indicated in Table 1, 73 percent of the urban schools followed the prescribed elementary curriculum, as compared with 38.7 percent of the rural schools. At the junior high school level, 58.3 percent of the urban schools and 39.3 percent of the rural schools complied. The compliance at the high school level was 75 percent for urban schools and 40 percent for rural schools.

Level of Teacher Qualification

The factor of teacher qualification was considered in terms of the number of qualified teachers in Liberia by counties and the level of education of those teachers. As indicated in Table 2, there were 7,182 teachers, out of a total of 9,099 teachers, who responded to a recent survey concerning their qualifications. It should be noted that of 4,795 urban teachers, 1,332 were considered trained (27.78 percent) and that of 2,387 rural teachers, 724 were considered trained (30.33 percent). It also seems pertinent to note that 1,779 of the urban teachers (37.10 percent) and 1,193 of the rural teachers (49.97 percent) had a high school education or less as their highest educational accomplishment.

TABLE 1

EXTENT TO WHICH LIBERIAN SCHOOLS FOLLOW THE LIST OF COURSES PRESCRIBED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Area	County	Elementary Schools			Junior High Schools			High Schools		
		Number of Schools	Number Following Program	Percent Following Program	Number of Schools	Number Following Program	Percent Following Program	Number of Schools	Number Following Program	Percent Following Program
Urban	Montserrado	241	200	83.0	52	43	83.0	35	33	94.3
Urban	Cape Mount	40	15	37.5	10	4	40.0	2	1	50.0
Urban	Grand Bassa	135	100	74.1	16	7	44.0	8	4	50.0
Urban	Sinoe	96	70	73.0	19	7	37.0	5	3	60.0
Urban	Maryland	121	75	62.0	23	9	39.1	10	4	40.0
TOTAL URBAN		633	460	73.0	120	70	58.3	60	45	75.0
Rural	Lofa	131	60	46.0	11	5	45.4	7	3	43.0
Rural	Bong	57	18	31.5	29	12	41.3	7	3	43.0
Rural	Nimba	187	75	40.0	34	13	38.2	15	6	40.0
Rural	Grand Gedeh	80	23	28.8	10	3	30.0	6	2	33.0
TOTAL RURAL		445	176	39.6	84	33	39.3	35	14	40.0

SOURCE.--Ministry of Education, The National Education Survey, 1979 (Monrovia, Liberia: Department of Planning and Development, 1979)

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TABLE 2

TOTAL NUMBER OF TRAINED AND UNTRAINED TEACHERS IN LIBERIA

County	TRAINED TEACHERS					UNTRAINED TEACHERS								
	Hold Teach. Cert.	2-4 yr. college	BA/BS	MA/MS	Total trained	Below high school	High School	2-4 yr. college	BA/BS	MA/MS	PhD	Total un-trained	Not Stated	Grand Total	Percent
Urban															
Montserrado	667	210	119	34	1030	176	324	223	287	71	9	1090	687	2807	36.7
Cape Mount	15	---	---	---	15	28	167	20	14	7	---	236	1	252	6.0
Grand Bassa	89	8	---	1	98	250	147	41	42	10	---	490	---	588	16.7
Sinoe	104	3	---	1	108	131	260	17	26	1	---	435	---	543	19.9
Maryland	4	54	21	2	81	47	249	154	66	8	---	524	---	605	13.0
TOTAL URBAN	879	315	140	38	1332	632	1147	455	435	97	9	2775	688	4795	100.0
Rural															
Lofa	184	11	25	1	221	106	175	14	42	14	1	352	21	594	27.2
Nimba	219	61	40	8	328	132	320	40	55	6	---	553	24	935	35.0
Bong	4	30	29	4	67	41	223	86	57	21	---	428	---	495	13.5
Grand Gedeh	92	7	8	1	108	72	124	7	19	5	---	227	28	363	29.8
TOTAL RURAL	499	109	102	14	724	351	842	147	173	50	1	1560	73	2387	100.0

SOURCE.--Ministry of Education, The National Education Survey, 1979 (Monrovia, Liberia: Department of Planning and Development, 1979)

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Furthermore, only 719 of the urban teachers (14.99 percent) and 340 of the rural teachers (14.24 percent) had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. While there are some discrepancies between the rural and urban teachers in respect to qualifications, it should be noted that the data do not reveal in total an essential difference between these two categories of teachers.

Physical Facilities

Table 3 contains information concerning the number and type of school buildings by county. It should be noted that in 72 percent of the rural schools and 47 percent of the urban schools, a building specifically built for a school was being used. While these data indicate a substantial superiority of the rural schools, the former Minister of Education, Dr. H. Brima Fahnbulleh, Jr., recently made the following observation about the physical facilities of the schools of Liberia:

> The Ministry of Education in this decade must address itself to the imbalances in educational opportunities. Education for self-reliance must democratize . . . by putting better facilities at the service of the rural people. Expenditures for educational facilities ought to be heavily weighted in favor of the rural areas in order to redress the imbalances. The drift to the city can be stopped by providing quality and productive education in the rural areas.[12]

Further evidence indicated that of the 299 junior and senior high schools surveyed, there were only 159 school libraries, 63 science laboratories, and 38 technical and vocational workshops.[13]

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF LIBERIAN SCHOOL BUILDINGS BY COUNTY AND WHERE THEY ARE HOUSED

County	Actual School Building	Church Building for School	Private Homes for School	Town Halls for School	Not Specified	Total	Percentage Not Actual School Building
Urban							
Montserrado	165	45	73	17	41	341	51.6
Cape Mount	86	6	5	12	5	54	51.9
Grand Bassa	80	31	27	1	27	166	51.8
Sinoe	62	59	7	8	12	148	51.8
Maryland	67	50	14	6	5	142	52.8
TOTAL URBAN	400	191	126	44	90	851	53.0
Rural							
Lofa	87	8	7	19	39	151	42.3
Nimba	198	13	17	7	9	244	18.8
Bong	74	16	---	1	5	96	23.0
Grand Gedeh	68	14	6	2	9	99	31.0
TOTAL RURAL	427	51	30	29	53	590	28.0

SOURCE.--Ministry of Education, The National Education Survey, 1979 (Monrovia, Liberia: Department of Planning and Development, 1979)

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Fiscal Allocation to Education

In Table 4, data are presented as to the recurrent expenditures for elementary and secondary education in 1979. In addition to the $26,886,810 allocated to the recurrent budget, $4,470,149 was allocated to the development budget, for a total of $31,356,959.[14] It should be noted that the educational expenditure per elementary child was $60, while that for each secondary child was $249. No data were available to indicate the relative support per pupil for rural students as opposed to the support for urban students.

Organization and Administration of Schools

As indicated above, the Liberian educational structure is based on a 6-3-3 system. The elementary school level is general and undifferentiated. The junior high school level is also general and undifferentiated, but provides vocational exploration as a basis for career guidance. The senior high school is divided into four areas: academic, vocational, agriculture, and commercial. The largest of these areas is the academic, which includes about 85 percent of the enrollment.[15]

The Ministry operates a centralized educational administration, functioning more effectively in the metropolitan Monrovia area than in outlying areas. The Ministry explains this imbalance as being because of difficulties with communication and transportation. Fahnbulleh addressed this problem by saying the following:

> . . . our major area of concern in this era of educational reconstruction should be the supervision of educational activities in the rural areas. This calls for the effective decentralization of decision-making . . . our objective is to give more authority to the county administrators to enable them to function more effectively.[16]

TABLE 4

RECURRENT EDUCATIONAL EXPENDITURE PER PUPIL IN LIBERIA, 1979

Educational Level	Student Enrollment S. E. (Ministry)	Budgetary Appropriation B. A. (Ministry)	Estimated Recurrent Expenditure Per Pupil (Ministry)	Actual Amount Spent Per Pupil BA/SE=AMS	Difference of ERF-AMS	Percentage
Elementary Level	207,916	$5,303,643	$ 60.00	$ 25.50	$ 34.50	57.5
Secondary Level	50,191	$7,479,413	$249.00	$149.02	$ 00.96	40.4

SOURCE:--Ministry of Education, Annual Report to the First Session of the Forty-Ninth Legislature, Republic of Liberia, January 1979--December 1979 (Monrovia, Liberia: Ministry of Education),

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In an effort to decentralize the administration of education in Liberia, to conserve the financial and material resources, to improve the delivery of supplies and equipment among schools throughout the country, and to offer necessary professional services, the Ministry has divided the nine counties into regions. Heading each region is a regional supervisor, under whose control are chief educational officers, who in turn supervise a number of district officers. The number of district educational officers varies depending on the size of the county.[17]

Discussion and Summary

The purpose of the present study was to determine if educational discrepancies exist between the urban and the rural sections of Liberia. Facets of education examined through a descriptive analysis by the investigators, included the following: curriculum, instructional facilities, finances or allocations, and administrative organization. The following conclusions have been drawn by the investigators from the data presented above:

1. The problem of the relevance of the curricula in the Liberian schools has been, and still is, a concern. A high drop-out rate indicates in part that the schools are not providing for the needs of the students. The prescribed curricula are not being followed by an appreciable number of the schools, with the problem being greater in the rural schools than in the urban schools.

2. The level of teacher qualification is low. About 65 percent of the teachers are unqualified or underqualified. This problem is of greater significance in the rural schools, where half of the teachers have a high school education or less as their highest educational accomplishment.

3. The school facilities are far below standards required for an effective school program. Nearly half of the buildings used were not built for school purposes; school libraries, science laboratories, and technical and vocational workshops are not available in many of the high schools.

4. The general lack of funding for education is a major problem. This lack of funding is greater in the elementary schools than in the secondary schools, but a differential between rural and urban schools was not proven in this study.

5. A centralized educational administration of the 6-3-3 school system is maintained. Ministry reports verify that an imbalance exists to the discredit of rural schools, primarily because of problems of communication and transportation.

It is to be assumed that many of the problems encountered by Liberia in respect to providing a strong educational program and maintaining a balance between rural and urban schools prevail in other developing nations. It is to be hoped that further research in Liberia and other nations will address such problems, with a view to stimulating more effective schools which will respond to the needs of the populations of those countries.

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